

## **JFAC S4 Ep.8: What does owning a minibus have to do with the matric pass rate?**

**Sandiswa Gwele:** [00:00:00] For the group of learners that I'm dealing with, it's the students who have persevered until matric and then unfortunately they didn't meet the minimum requirements to pass the matric. They don't fall under the Department of Education, they are unemployed, they don't fall under any tertiary institutions.

They are on their own trying to survive, trying to take a second chance, but there's no one to catch them.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? A doctor? An astronaut? A vet? For 44 percent of South Africa's youth, having a job at all would be a dream.

**ENCA YT clip:** Well, I want to be a mechanical engineer, a musician, a businessman.

When I grow up, I want to be a meteorologist.

I want to be a doctor and an actor. I won't be scared because I'm too confident.

Young dreams. [00:01:00] But as reality unfolds in front of them, many know wishes don't always come true.

Some people have like degrees, but still though, they are still living in the townships.

Not finding a job after I'm done in matric.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** The key word here is matric. A matriculant or high school graduate can expect to earn almost double the salary of someone who has not finished high school. But in 2023, only 55 percent of the learners who started school in 2012 finished grade 12. What kind of future are the early school leavers facing?

And what can be done to deal with this crisis?

**Changer Her For the Better YT clip:** So nowadays, um, you can't find work without matric because even the, the jobs that we undermine as people like cleaning or being a domestic worker, sometimes they require one to have matric. So matric is very important. It's [00:02:00] like a huge, like it's a big deal to have matric because without matric, you cannot do anything.

Like you cannot find a proper job to put food on the table for your family, or even for yourself to make something for yourself.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Welcome to season four of the Just For a Change podcast, powered by the Bertha Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. I'm your host Ntombini Marrengane.

In this season, we're looking at unexpected connections, surprising overlaps, and unusual alignments in the work being done locally and globally that's moving our societies forward in positive ways.

Just a reminder that the views shared by our guests may not necessarily reflect the views of the Bertha Center.

In an ideal world, children at school would be able to perform at their best, passing or failing on their own merits and hard work. But in reality, the reason for an early exit from the school system is [00:03:00] likely out of their control.

The language of instruction, scarce resources at home, such as transport to school, electricity or food, having to care for other family members, a lack of role models to motivate and validate their efforts, or an unsafe environment around them, or all of the above. While a matric certificate can give South Africa's youth a more equitable chance as they enter the workforce, what about those who have failed and want to try again?

Well, their chances of passing are not much better if their circumstances stay the same. Our guest for this episode is hoping to change that.

Sandiswa Gwele is the founder of the Ukhanyo Foundation, a nonprofit organisation that offers support for learners who have failed their matric exams. She also owns a shuttle service, L & S Shuttles, which provided the initial funding to start the Ukhanyo Foundation. But first let's hear from Ntsiki Sackey, Marketing and Communications Officer at the Solution Space at [00:04:00] UCT's Graduate School of Business.

**Ntsiki Sackey:** My name is Ntsiki Sackey.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** The Solution Space is an ecosystem for high impact early startups, corporate innovation, and entrepreneurial development and research.

I asked Ntsiki to tell us more about some exciting innovations in youth development that will bring us closer to a more equal society.

**Ntsiki Sackey:** I'm sure by now we've heard the saying that we are the ones we've been waiting for, and we really are, considering how young, um, the African continent is, it is so important that as young people we take up the onus to do things for ourselves.

We can no longer rely on government, we can no longer rely on someone else to do something. It's up to us to do something and that is what entrepreneurship offers. So these different programmes and initiatives that run are fantastic because they positively impact your development by driving innovation, you know, in education and skills development, by [00:05:00] creating job opportunities, by also providing young people with role models in the space.

And entrepreneurs are often involved in mentorship programmes and initiatives that aims to inspire and empower the youth to pursue their own entrepreneurial endeavours. So it really is a matter of just taking things into our own hands and doing something and that is what South Africa is, entrepreneurial talent is doing, and it's exciting, and it's really an exciting time as well to be in and to live in, to see young people doing things for themselves and how far they can go.

One thing they definitely need to make it work is the support, and with the support, whether it's through different programmes, through funding, whatever it may be, or through just a second chance, um, all of that is worth it and it's exciting to see what the future holds.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** As Ntsiki shows us, it takes commitment and effort from all sectors of society [00:06:00] to improve education outcomes for our young people.

Our guest today, Sandiswa Gwele, knows about this firsthand. She is the founder of the Ukhanyo Foundation and owner of L& S Shuttles. Hello Sandiswa, thank you so much for joining me today, it's great to have you with us.

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Hi, Ntombini. Thank you for inviting me.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Let's start with something simple. Why is it so important for learners to pass matric? And what are the risks of dropping out?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** It is very important for learners to pass matric, in fact, for our young people to have a matric certificate. A matric certificate gives the young people, um, access to opportunities, all the entry level decent jobs require a matric certificate so if you do not have matric, you are unlikely to be unemployed and be excluded from all those opportunities.

And also, if you want, the young people want to study further, go to university, it gives you the option to study the, the career of your [00:07:00] choice, you are not limited, uh, as compared to someone that does not have matric that you only can go to college or you can only do short courses. If you have your matric and if it's a good matric, you can go to university and do any course that you desire to do.

Um, yeah, the risk of dropping out, it's very risky because it means that high youth unemployment will increase and also it means that this young person will repeat the cycle of poverty and not participate in the economy of the country.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Yes, that's a big risk. Please tell us what does your programme offer? What is it that these young people need most?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Ukhanyo Foundation offers young people who have failed matric a matric second chance. And under the matric second chance, we have realised that we're not only going to offer academic support so we have three pillars of Ukhanyo that we offer.

The first one is academic support, we have, um, classes at Philippi village from [00:08:00] Monday to Friday. We use sub, we support our young people, provide them with books, uh, any learning resources that they need to successfully prepare for their matric exams. We do self development sessions where we work with young people trying to boost their confidence and change their mindset and help them with, uh, tools to become resilient and rise above the challenges that they are, they are facing on a daily basis.

And I think what the young people need the most is the support from the, from their families. I think that they also need to be recognized in our communities and they also need to be affirmed that they are smart, they are good, they are capable of achieving great things.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** I was just about to ask you and what role do parents play in all of this?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Parents are playing a very big role in this and it's unfortunate that the experience that I've [00:09:00] had in the past four years of working with the young people is that it's unfortunate that parents without realising that the role that they are playing in terms of bringing their self esteem of their children down is big.

It's very important for the, for these young people to hear from home that you are capable, you are good because it's pointless for me at Ukhanyo Foundation to tell them all these things and then when they get home, they are told they are stupid, they, they can't, they're not capable. So the role of parents, the role of the community at large is very important to boost the self esteem of our young people.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Is there any engagement from Ukhanyo side with the parents or caregivers of these matric rewriting students?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Yes, we've realised that we can't do it alone as Ukhanyo Foundation, so our parents are very involved. We call them often, we have a meeting again with them again on the 8th of [00:10:00] June. We encourage them to kind of, you know, when it comes to self development, the language that parents use at home is very important.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Very.

**Sandiswa Gwele:** In terms of building your child's self esteem so we are very involved, we do the parenting dialogues where we also equip the

parents in terms of parenting because parenting is very difficult as well. So yeah, we do get involved and parents are very involved.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** That's incredible because sometimes our well meaning community projects don't quite take because they don't involve all the key stakeholders, but it sounds like you've deliberately done that in Ukhanyo.

What advice would you give a young person that has recently failed matric and how do you help students build their self esteem after the setback of failing exams?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** The advice that I would give to a young person who failed matric is that don't change your dreams.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Beautiful

**Sandiswa Gwele:** You can still be successful, take a second chance rewrite your matric [00:11:00] push continue pushing you are capable of achieving great things. Success is not for other people. it is for you to just continue pushing.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** I think even with young people and society at large look up to as being the example of success, what we don't hear about their stories often is that there were, there were failures, there were stumbles along the way. And the careful and thoughtful way that Ukhanyo tries to not only materially support the students who want to rewrite their matric with space to study and learning materials, but also trying to work on trying to



work on their self esteem and getting their parents to to lift them up as well.

It's really important. I mean, everything has to be looked at from multiple perspectives and it sounds like that's what's happening at Ukhanyo. I'm curious, you know, young people today are [00:12:00] growing up in a very different world than we may have grown up in because they've got social media. Um, they have the ability to connect with people in all different parts of the world from the palm of their hands.

How have you had to, or have you had to change your message or your approaches at all? Because of the new ways that young people think and interact and consume information?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Oh, yes, we are living in a very different world. So what I've also learned from working with young people is that the parenting style is, is, is, is very important that as parents, as leaders that are working in these communities or working with young people, we need to be open-minded and allow young people to teach us how to treat them.

The approach is now different. We need to ask them, what is it that they want? How would they like us to intervene? Instead of [00:13:00] coming to them with a push system of saying, this is what I do, this is how I'm going to do it. Otherwise, you are not going to succeed, you need to get involved, you need to bring yourself down.

And, and, from the, from being a parent or the boss or the leader and bring yourself down to their level in terms of language, in terms of, of the

mindset, you need to bring yourself down and ensure that you get them involved and yeah, otherwise they are amazing if you, if you are able to pull them in and get them involved.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What about providing support to learners in the years leading up to Matric? What are the gaps there?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** There are a few gaps in terms of the learners that are currently at school, but fortunately for those students there are so many interventions, and those interventions are funded by government because those students still belong under the Department of Education.

And, um, for the group of learners that [00:14:00] I'm, I'm dealing with is that, um, it's the students who have persevered until matric and then unfortunately they didn't meet the minimum requirements to pass the matric. They don't fall under the Department of Education, they are unemployed, they don't fall under any tertiary institutions.

They are on their own trying to survive, trying to take a second chance, but there's no one to catch them. So, and that's one of the reasons of Ukanyo was founded, is because there's no one to catch these young people. And each and every year we have more than 200, 000 young people who fail matric each and every year.

So we focus on that group specifically because there are other interventions for the students that are currently still at school, who belongs to the Department of Education.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** I believe you didn't pass matric yourself so you can understand what young people are going through what or who helped you to get where you are today?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Yes, I didn't pass my matric. [00:15:00] Um, when I was doing my matric and that is really helping me now in terms of shaping Ukhanyo foundation. And in terms of understanding where they're coming from and I also use my story as a, as a motivation to them because I also failed the matric, but today I am running my own successful business.

So there's nothing impossible if you put your mind and your work hard towards it, you use that failure and you turn it into a great opportunity. I think the people who helped me the most during this journey was my family and my mentor. I was fortunate that I had mentor and I had people that believed in me.

I had people that were telling me things that I do not, I didn't even know. I remember my mentor used to say to me, Sandy, you, you, you are capable, Sandy you will go places. And I was like, I'll go places, you know? So I realised that it is very important as a young person to have people who [00:16:00] believe in you.

And that's why Ukhanyo is there to be there and say to these young people, you can do this, you are capable. I guess it's my family, my networks and my mentor and all the people that I was surrounded with gave me that confidence and the affirmations that I am great and I can achieve anything.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Having that community support is really important.

What inspired your dream of giving young people a second chance at matric? When was the moment that you knew you had to start Ukhanyo Foundation?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** What inspired me to start Ukhanyo Foundation, um, was the realisation when I was looking back, uh, to where I come from and looking at how I was supported by people.

So I committed to myself that I will lift as I rise, I'm going to make it my responsibility to pull some of those hopeless young people that are sitting there thinking that there's no [00:17:00] success there, for them. I will pull them up with me, I will use my resources that I have, I will use my networks so that they can benefit from my networks and help those young people so that they can be successful in life.

So, the day I decided to start Ukhanyo Foundation, I was driving my son to Plumstead High School and the matric results were out that morning and everyone was so excited about, about the pass rate and the top achievers, but my heart was with those who did not make it.

And I said to my son, I'm gonna speak to your father, I'm going to speak to my daughter, It's about time that I do something. I'm going to get 10 young people who failed matric, and I'm going to ask if I can be part of their journey and give them space in my office and I will seek resources for them, I will make sure that I'm part of their journey and give them safe space to be vulnerable, to talk about their dreams.

But the only thing that I want to tell them is that they mustn't change their dreams, they can do this, there is a second [00:18:00] chance. So, yeah, that was the moment and the day and, um, from that day, I started to work on it without any resources, without any funding, without even a clear plan of what I was going to do. I started to work on it.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** And what was the reaction of the young people and their families when you approached them with this opportunity?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** The reaction from the young people was very positive. They had that, yo it's sis Sandi from Philippi, she's running her own business she wants to be part of us. Um, they were excited they wanted to come to me, but their families were concerned because who is this person? Why does she want to do what she wants to do?

It's not an, it's not an organisation that is registered, but she's saying she wants to do this and she's like, so families were concerned, young people were eager, they wanted to come.

I remember we had one, uh, student from Kayamandi in Stellenbosch, Buhle. Buhle came all the way from Kayamandi and her [00:19:00] parents was, were concerned. When she came to Philippi for the very first time, she got lost, she came to my office she is one of our success stories now today. So it was positive from the young people. It was only the parents that were concerned.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Understandably. Please tell me more about how L&S Shuttles is involved with Ukhanyo Foundation in addition to providing funding.

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Let me put it this way, without L&S Shuttles Services, there would not have been Ukhanyo Foundation because of my passion for community and for the young people, I'm using L&S resources, starting from L&S offices.

My staff from L&S Shuttle Services, they get involved in, um, Ukhanyo Foundation, my clients, my L&S clients, in terms of sponsorships, I reach out to them when I'm looking for resources, when I'm looking for networks. So, um, L&S is the main, in terms of transport, I like to expose our, our [00:20:00] students.

When we go out to do the hikes or to go out and experience different things, L&S transport our students and, um, yeah, and I'm using my networks to benefit these young people who do not have big circles of networks. So I'm using all my networks from L&S to benefit Ukhanyo Foundation and my students.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What was a significant challenge you encountered when you started your shuttle business and how did you overcome it?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** The significant challenge I faced when I started L&S shuttle services was the funding was capital to start the business. I didn't have capital to start the business and the second one was access to the market. I'm new in the industry, I had no experience in the transport

industry. It was the biggest challenge and I think the other biggest challenge.

It was the fear of unknown It was a fear that what if this business does not do well, I don't have any backup [00:21:00] from my family financially if things don't go well, I will be in trouble with my family, you know uh, yeah, but I had to take a risk and a leap of faith and try and push my vision

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Amazing. What have been some of the highlights of your journey thus far?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Yeah, the highlight of my journey so far was that, is that one of them is that, um, having my own business gave me the opportunity to fulfil my purpose, to fulfil my calling and run Ukhnyo Foundation. And, um, and the fulfilment that I get from creating employment, the fulfilment I get by impacting the lives of people of the young people and, and, and, and in 2022, I won an international award in Dubai for the work that I'm doing for Ukhanyo Foundation. [00:22:00]

And that has been the biggest highlight. It was like a dream that, because I never realised that, um, people were, were, were noticing the work that I was doing for Ukhanyo Foundation and winning that international award was the wow for me.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** It sounds like wow and I can hear in your voice the passion that you have for this work. What has the impact of your work been so far? How many learners have you been able to help?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Um, yeah, it's a lot. If you're looking at where we started, we started, I started with only 10 young people and now this year in 2024 alone, we are supporting 143 students.

And when I'm adding up from the 10 to each and every year, we have supported almost 350 young people. And we've impacted their lives [00:23:00] positively, even those who did not make it because we don't get 100 percent pass, but in terms of their self esteem, in terms of them, like their mindset, in terms of, of, of, of their realised the potential that they have in them and the things that we expose them to, in terms of not only passing the matric, we get them involved.

We, we, we inspire them to start their own businesses. We have a language that we speak that as young people, guys, we need to stop becoming job seekers and start becoming job creators using the limited resources that we have, you know, so we expose them to so many things.

So even if they don't pass the matric, I'm very pleased to say that we still impact their lives positively.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Which came first, Sandiswa, the business or the foundation?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** The business came first, I was retrenched in 2013, my husband was retrenched in 2012. So, together, I, I had many, uh, business ideas, [00:24:00] so, we start, we decided, let's start a profitable business first.



The transport business, that's going to give me a job, and that's going to give my husband a job and then, it was a deal that, I'm going to run the business. We're going to be together for maybe say three to four years and then after that, I'll be able to start my own NPO and start doing the community work.

So it has been a very interesting journey, it was, it was a very good strategic decision to start with a profitable business because that profitable business was able, um, to give me the resources and the freedom, um, and, and, and to start the NGO and fulfil my purpose and fulfil my dream of making a difference.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Retaking your matric, that's, that's something that actually requires a different set of skills, right? It's, it's about being consistent, methodical, and trying to [00:25:00] learn in the old way the content needed to, to succeed in the exam. So I'm wondering about the disconnect, like you're trying to help them, let's study, let's review, let's, but I mean, they're in their daily lives.

These things are much more, faster pace, um, because of the environment that they're growing up with. How do you manage that?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** It's very difficult to manage that, but I think that because of the, the, they learned the hard way last year or during their matric exams and, and we are dealing with the group that came to us and say, I would like to, I would like the second chance.

So, we're saying yes, we would like the second chance. Now, we are here. We are not going to make it happen for you, you are still responsible. We are your support structure.

You are responsible and I always say to them, you know, I've got a lot to do, I'm busy, I'm running my own business, I don't have time to waste here.

So I'm [00:26:00] taking my family time here. I'm taking my resources so we don't play here, we don't play here, you know, and also always say, you know, I've got an iPhone, I always show them my iPhone I say, do you see I have an iPhone? Do you see the cars that I'm driving? They didn't just come. I worked hard so it's about hard work.

You will only reap the rewards of your hard work, you don't want to work hard, so you're not going to get it again, you know. So success is not easy, but you have to just work hard for it, and you'll get the results.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** And I think that's, that's so powerful having that message from someone not on TV, not online, but someone that they can meet and speak to and call when they need to.

And if they take in that message and the opportunity of the help you're offering, I can imagine that they will go very far. Where do you see your foundation in five years time?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** I'm [00:27:00] seeing the foundation expanding. This year, what I'm currently doing, um, Ntombini, I'm currently trying to do capacity building. For the very first time, I have employed seven full time teachers for Ukhanyo Foundation.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Wow.

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Now we also have a team, we have a project coordinator, we have the HR administrator, so I'm building Ukhanyo Foundation, I'm trying to separate Ukhanyo from L&S so that Ukhanyo Foundation can be an independent organisation that is running on its own. We're trying to strengthen the programme, I'm trying to get resources and funds so that it can be an organisation that can be able to impact the lives of young people beyond Western Cape.

We would love to go to the Eastern Cape, we would love to go to Johannesburg because we're getting queries. There are so many desperate young people out there who are hopeless, who would like us to support them so, um, I'm doing my best [00:28:00] to identify key stakeholders and partners that can help us, um, impact more lives and increase our impact and our footprint in South Africa at large.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Amazing. So can anyone donate funds or sponsor a student? What can people listening do to learn more or get involved with supporting your work?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Yes, we are currently looking for donations um, in terms of funding money, we're looking for stationary donations. We're looking for food donations as our young people come they're hungry.

So as part of our offering, we even started to give our, to provide our students with food because you cannot teach a hungry student. So please get involved by visiting our website and you can donate through the

website. You can get involved by not only giving us money by sharing your skills.

You can come and run workshops at Philippi Village, empowering our young people, you can come to our space and talk about [00:29:00] your industry and expose our young people to the different industries that are out there that they are not aware of. So, we're not only looking for involvement in terms of funds and money only, but we like your involvement you can come and mentor our students, you can come and motivate us and yeah, please, we would really like your involvement.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Two questions that we ask all of our guests this season, uhm I'm going to ask you now, why do you do the work that you do and what makes you hopeful?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** I am doing the work that I do because it breaks my heart to see the youth unemployment, especially in our communities. When I'm talking in our communities, specifically in the Western Cape, I'm talking Khayelitsha, I'm talking Philippi Village, I'm talking Gugulethu, I'm talking Nyanga. It's so sad to see how we are losing our young people to drugs, to [00:30:00] harmful activities, they end up getting involved in harmful activities.

And because they become hopeless, they become dangerous to themselves, they become dangerous to their own families, they become dangerous. to the society at large. So I'm doing the work that I'm doing because I would like to support these people and work with them so that

together we can break the cycle of poverty in their, in their, in their, in their lives and in their communities.

And I'm very hopeful, I'm very hopeful um, when I'm looking at the youth of South Africa, so if we can support them and give them the tools that they need to become resilient and push and push and work hard and, and realise that, uh, they are responsible to change their own circumstances and to change their lives for better and they are capable of doing that. I'm very hopeful.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** And my second question for you is [00:31:00] what does social innovation mean to you?

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Social innovation, um, to me, um, means that we need to find different ways of, of, of, of solving the social deals that we're going through. And there's a need for us to find new ways of solving problems instead of using the old ways of doing things.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you so much Sandiswa for sharing your inspiring story with us, everyone deserves a second chance, especially those starting out in life. Your work is giving young people an important message of hope, backed up by tangible, practical support. Thank you so much.

**Sandiswa Gwele:** Thank you. Thank you so much sisi.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** If we are to work toward social justice in South Africa, the resources need to be given to those who face the most challenges.

That means systemic change and more being done to support learners throughout their school careers to give them a better chance at that final hurdle. [00:32:00] We should all have the same opportunities to participate in society and to change things for the better.

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